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S E C R E T KUWAIT 000327

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STATE FOR T AND NEA/ARPI

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON KEY ISSUES FOR UNDERSECRETARY BOLTON'S JANUARY 28-29 VISIT TO KUWAIT

REF: 04 KUWAIT 4427

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶11.** (S) Since your last visit, the GOK welcomed the transfer of sovereignty to the interim Iraqi government and has been a strong supporter of holding elections on January 30. The GOK has also encouraged Sunni participation in elections and Kuwaitis are hoping greater stability will result from the installation of an elected government. Domestically, recent threats and terror activities have received heavy media attention and Kuwait's senior leadership is being criticized for not taking stronger measures to prevent militants from establishing cells in Kuwait.

**¶12.** (C) ARTICLE 98: Progress is slow on GOK approval of the agreement, but we maintain an active dialogue with senior officials on the need to conclude the agreement. In October, FM Dr. Mohammed informed the Ambassador that the agreement was being fast-tracked through the National Assembly. Members of Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee discussed the agreement on December 22, and it is possible the agreement will be discussed by the full National Assembly on February 2. Because of Kuwaiti observance of the Eid-al-Adha holiday, it was not possible to get a status report in time for transmission of this message. We will have an update when you arrive. (NOTE: We treat the existence of the agreement as Confidential, because it has never been publicly confirmed by the GOK. END NOTE.)

**¶13.** (C) CONCERN ABOUT IRAN: FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammed has called Iran "the biggest threat to Gulf countries," in part because of the long-term strategic threat presented by its nuclear program. Kuwait is skeptical of Iran's assertions that its nuclear program is for peaceful, civilian purposes and its promises to suspend uranium enrichment. The GOK also believes that Iran would welcome a Shi'a-dominated Iraq and has cautioned Tehran not to meddle in Iraqi issues. Nonetheless, the GOK considers it necessary to maintain an open dialogue with Iran, but does not believe it has much ability to influence Iranian behavior.

**¶14.** (S) COUNTER-TERRORISM: Recent confrontations with Kuwaiti homegrown terrorists, some in the military, have prompted considerable criticism of government inaction and Islamist tolerance of terrorism. It is too soon to tell whether the Kuwaiti authorities will follow up on their recent aggressive actions against terrorists with a full-fledged sustained effort. There is cooperation in U.S. and UN efforts to freeze bank accounts of terror suspects and their financiers, and we continue to engage Kuwait's leaders on the need for cooperation on all facets of the Global War on Terror.

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LEBARON